

Public Testimony Before the Joint Committee on Human Services
Regarding the Department of Rehabilitation Services in Governor's Bill #6367
Tuesday, February 26, 2013

Senator Gayle Slossberg and Representative Catherine Abercrombie, Co-Chairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you and the Committee members about the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Human Services Programs. I am Dr. Harvey Corson, President of the Connecticut Association of the Deaf (CAD).

Let me begin by saying that during the 2011 Legislative session, there was a public hearing regarding the proposed merger of some state agencies -- namely the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, the Board of Education and Services for the Blind, the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, the Workers' Rehabilitation Program, and the Driver Training Program for People with Disabilities -- under a new Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) to be headed by a Commissioner.

Although there were some concerns and misgivings about this proposed merger, recognizing the severity of economic situation that this State as well as the nation was going through and understanding that cost savings as a result of such a merger were needed during that time of budget constraints, the leadership of the Deaf Community went along with the idea of the proposed merger.

Now two years later in 2013, we now see this new merged department known as DORS, functioning with three major components -- Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind, and Business Services. The former state agency known as the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI) no longer exists under the DORS as a separate agency, bureau, or division, but has been grouped as "Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services" with its Interpreting Unit placed under the Business Services and its Counseling Unit placed under the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.

The Commission on Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI) was established in 1974, being the first statewide service agency of its kind in the United States, and served as a model for other states that subsequently established their comparable agencies. For 37 years the CDHI had a commendable record of service with a program leader and a cohesive program of services until the state mandated merger came into effect on July 1, 2011.

Today I am testifying that the Deaf Community is still concerned about "Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services" not formally organized as a Bureau within the DORS so this "Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services" grouping would not have an official standing, identity, and recognition within the state government and that the "Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services" does not have a program leader. We need a program leader for an appropriate and cohesive delivery of services, including information, resources, and referral for the public and the state government, on behalf of a low incidence population that is frequently overlooked and underserved.

Today I am asking you for your consideration and support to include in the Governor's Bill #6367 an appropriate mechanism and sufficient resources to provide for the establishment of a Bureau of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services and its program leader position within the DORS. Thank you.